

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 604

By Sexton

A RESOLUTION relative to Taft Youth Development Center.

WHEREAS, the State of Tennessee is considering terminating the operation of Taft Youth Development Center, which is located in Bledsoe County near Pikeville; and

WHEREAS, Taft Youth Development Center provides a high quality service to the most disturbed male youths in the State of Tennessee, and its success rate is unparalleled in this arena; and

WHEREAS, serving approximately 90-100 male students, ages 16 through 19, from across the state, Taft is the most restrictive of the youth development centers, as it serves older and more serious offenders. The youth at Taft have adult sentences, serious delinquent offenses, are serving a third commitment, or have exhibited severe behavior problems at one of the regional youth development centers; and

WHEREAS, while at Taft, these young men receive individualized and group therapy, alcohol and drug treatment by certified substance abuse counselors, a specialized program for violent offenders, and an extensive recreation and arts program that offers every opportunity for rehabilitation; and

WHEREAS, the individuals at Taft have earned the highest successful GED rate of all such facilities in the state. Taft's vocational rehabilitation program certifies students, and its recidivism rate is the lowest in the State of Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, Taft also has an interscholastic football program that includes competition with area high schools and is the oldest and one of only seven such existing programs in the nation. This interscholastic athletic program is an instrumental part of the community, in that it supports the community, and the community embraces the program and the individuals involved; and

WHEREAS, the closing of Taft Youth Development Center would be extremely detrimental to these serious male offenders. Such closing would create a vacuum of on-site schooling that provides basic academic subjects, vocational training in ten subject areas, special education services, plus GED preparation and testing that enables and encourages these young men to pursue a lifestyle of social, personal, and economic growth; and

WHEREAS, the closing of Taft Youth Development Center would not only be detrimental to these older serious offenders, it would have a devastating impact on the younger juvenile offenders with whom they would be placed; and

WHEREAS, Taft's closing would not be a positive step forward, but rather would be a dangerous decision that would jeopardize the futures and lives of young juvenile offenders by subjecting them to the influence of older, more serious offenders; and

WHEREAS, Taft Youth Development Center provides an economic stimulus to the region through jobs and other ventures that are vital to the economic foundation of Cumberland, Bledsoe, and Van Buren counties; and

WHEREAS, the economic well being of Cumberland, Bledsoe, and Van Buren counties would be negatively affected by the closing of Taft Youth Development Center, as approximately 200 jobs at the facility would be lost; and

WHEREAS, the closing of Taft would also have a detrimental impact on the region's 911 emergency system and its already struggling businesses in a depressed economy; and

WHEREAS, the General Assembly strongly believes that the juvenile offenders placed at Taft should remain an integral part of this community; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED SEVENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we strongly urge and encourage the Governor to carefully consider the abovementioned factors, abandon any plans to terminate the facility, and continue the operation of and funding for Taft Youth Development Center.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that a certified copy of this resolution be transmitted to the Honorable Bill Haslam, Governor of the State of Tennessee.